MY APPEAL TO AMERICA

CHARLES WAGNER

Author of The Simple Life

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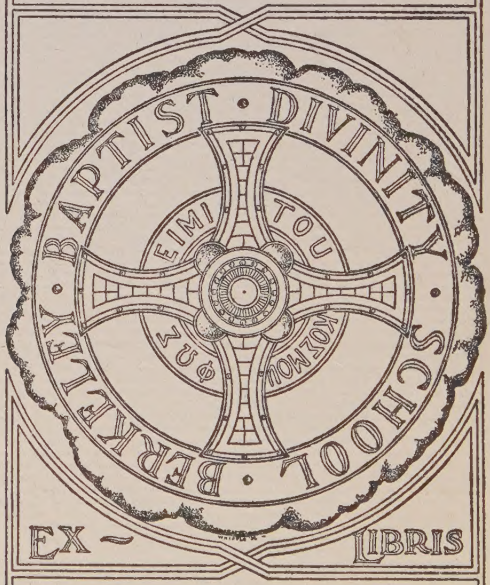

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MY APPEAL TO AMERICA

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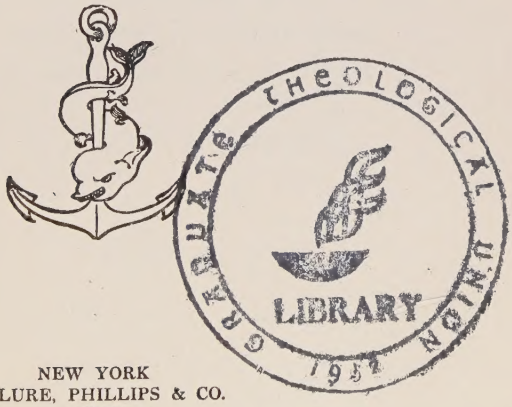
BEING MY FIRST ADDRESS TO AN AMERICAN AUDIENCE

[WITH NOTES AND APPENDIX AND AN INTRODUCTION BY LYMAN ABBOTT, D.D., LL.D.]

BY CHARLES WAGNER

AUTHOR OF THE SIMPLE LIFE, THE BETTER WAY BY THE FIRESIDE, ETC.



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As a hearty good-bye to my American friends, I send them this little book. May it be a new link between them and myself. I leave the shores of America with immense riches of happy recollections and the hope to come again.

God bless your great President, your lordly country, your children and you all.

C. WAGNER

Dec. 1st, 1904

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INTRODUCTION
BY
LYMAN ABBOTT, D.D., LL.D.

Some of the critics are asking, what is the secret of Mr. Wagner's extraordinary popularity? There is nothing, they say, original in his books, nothing, certainly, original in "The Simple Life"; and they are quite right. "The Simple Life" reaffirms and reillustrates simple truths older than Christianity. But the critics are mistaken in supposing that the world's greatest need is new truth, or even old truth put in strikingly new forms. What it needs much more is old and familiar truth so presented as to become powerful in the lives of men. It needs vitalized truth rather than new truth, and Mr. Wagner has given to the world vitalized truth.

The life of the twentieth century is extraordinarily complex; this complexity is in part due to our economic, social, and ethical progress; but it is in part due to false estimates of values,

to the habit, as old as the human race, of putting the material above the spiritual, the transitory above the eternal, things above men. All peoples in this commercial age, and, in some sense, pre-eminently the American people, needed a message which would rouse them to themselves, which would make them apply common sense to life problems, and estimate the real and the temporal, the material and the spiritual in their right relations. This Mr. Wagner has done. His books, and especially "The Simple Life," owe their popularity to the fact that he has brought to the age a message which the age needed, and he has so presented that message that the age is listening to it, and perhaps heeding it.

What has enabled him to present this message so that the world hears and heeds, is not merely his keen perception of the need, his realization of truth in its concrete, that is, its vital forms, his pictorial imagination, his mastery of style. More than any or all of these qualities combined is the fact that his books

are the spontaneous expression of his own experience; his own life is in his writings. It is because he preserves his youth in middle life, that he can write of youth; it is because he lives a simple life in the gayest capital of Europe, that he can write of the simple life. The critic who does not understand this secret of spiritual power calls Mr. Wagner egotistical. It is true that he writes of himself, but the critic should remember that the greatest spiritual writings are in the same sense egotistical. It is this naïve egotism, this self-revelation, which is the farthest possible removed from self-conceit, that gives perpetuity to such literature as the Hebrew Psalter, the Epistles of Paul, the poetry of Dante, the fiction of Victor Hugo, the preaching of Jonathan Edwards and Phillips Brooks. Some of these are more egotistical in form than others, but they all palpitate with that life which only the self-revelation of a true experience can impart to the printed page. In this little volume Mr. Wagner talks of himself with the simplicity of a child, and lets all his

readers see what is the secret of his power. If every preacher would discover that secret and attain that power there would be no longer any complaint of empty pews. The world's chief need is great and simple truth applied to present needs, and expressed with the power which only a living experience can impart. It is because Charles Wagner meets this need that his writings are so eagerly sought and so widely read.

LYMAN ABBOTT

January 1st, 1905

MY APPEAL TO AMERICA

Ladies and Gentlemen: — Before beginning this lecture — before even greeting you — I have to offer you a confession: I am anxious, sincerely anxious, and the reason thereof is as short to give as it is easy to understand. I am anxious, for never has such a young English speaker filled a pulpit in this country. If you see on this tribune a grey-haired head, it owns to the Frenchman in myself. And that Frenchman is quite fifty-two. As for the English-speaking man, he is only about one and a half, and he speaks like his age. Serious accidents are to happen. When I say accidents, I ought to say *real crimes*. Here you shall have the sight of a man using (I am afraid) your sweet language very roughly. There will be wounded adjectives, murdered verbs, lynched pronouns. But you may be sure that if these crimes are

perpetrated, there is neither malice nor premeditation. And thus having made beforehand for them a proper apology and been fully horrified by them, I dare to beg of you a large, a magnanimous, and, if I may say, an American absolution.

And now, dear friends, let me greet you heartily; on the occasion of this first visit, so empassioning for me, *let me greet the grand, the lordly America!* A nation is like an ocean. Facing a nation new to me, it seems I am on the shore of an immense sea, now smiling, now severe. And not only do I look at the present waves, the people living just at this moment: I see far away, above your heads, the phantasms of your immortal ancestors crowning the limits of your history, as, when comes down the eventide, golden clouds do crown the top of the hills. And still above the business of the day, above even the heroic past, I gaze on your national ideal, the true American ideal such as your President has realized in happy words,

in strenuous deeds, such as you have symbolized in your flag — an ideal so pure and seated so high, that you would embody it neither by any form nor colour of things which vanish away, but only by that what is firm and immutable, namely, the stars of the sky.

Now that we are met, the first care may be to fill scrupulously the hours given us to spend together. *If time is money, life is gold.* I want to make two parts of my time here in America. The first part shall be for learning, for listening, like a diligent scholar, in that strenuous school of men which is America. In the second part, I shall try to give you the best of my own treasury.

What I come to learn and to watch here is not, in the first range, the lustre of your tremendous activity, the torrent-like agitation of your cyclopic cities, the miracles of your industry, the gigantic character of your large country, its rivers and its mountains. All that is great, is an object of amazement over the whole world. Yet all that is but the visible sign

of an invisible spirit. World and nature come from Spirit. Civilizations, as many as there are, societies, cities and laws, are the work of men, burst out of man's heart. "Heart," says the Holy Writ, "is the well-spring of life." And that is what I am here to search after: *the heart of America.* I want to find out the hidden moving-power of your manly walking ever and ever ahead! I am a pilgrim toward the inmost sanctuary, where is burning the sacred fire of your tradition, of your faith, of your ideal, that fire which lighted the old times, which you ought to keep alive, carefully, in order that it may still be enlightening and warning your present and even shedding a leading ray over the paths of the future. May I find the way of your hearts. May all my journey over this country, my visit at your brotherly homes, become a work of love and a blessing in many ways. What I am able to offer is very little, if I consider all that which you will give to me. But that very little will be given heartily. I bring you the best part of myself,

the inmost and very precious part of a man's experience, the result of his labour and of the working of God in his soul — in one word, my faith; that of which I live, that which, in the deepest secret of my own self, is my inspiring spirit.

I want to speak to you about the simple life, the true life which is the secret of all my work, which is born out of my experiences among the world. I wish to show you the birth of my ideas and also of my books. For, what I think, what I say, whatever I have written, all that grows out of life itself. I am not a recluse, or sedentary refiner, or a dreamer hunting in his narrow cell some impracticable Utopia. I am no more one of those who turn their back towards the future, who have their eyes enlightened only by the pale gleam of the past and never have suspected there was round about them a living world. I have nothing in common with these dyspeptic minds lamenting eternally and sad to death that they were not born in the times of their great-grandfathers.

I am the son of this time. I love it passionately. Every day I find it more fascinating. I love it for its greatness, its intense labour; I love it, too, for its miseries and its pains. And precisely because I love it, I can't bear seeing the men of to-day wasting their strength, their money, their blood for idle fancies. I would be one of those who deliver us from these dead idols, to which we sacrifice ourselves and our welfare. From all the roads I have been treading, from all my observation among my fellow-men, I have learned a lesson which grows clearer for me the more I am advancing in age: *One thing is necessary — that man make a good use of his life.* Life is the highest gift we have received; it must not be wasted for mere smoke; it ought to serve the purpose which was in the mind of the Lord of Life when he gave it to us. In order to realize that purpose life needs to be a normal one. A normal life is a simplified life disencumbered of useless baggage, and working a maximum of beauty, justice, confidence in God and human bounty — a maxi-

mum of happiness with a minimum of embarrassment. Wherever simplicity fails, overgrowing weed invades the garden of life; the unnecessary, the accessory, the wrong and false take the place of the necessary, the important, the authentic — and the bright appearance of such a vainglorious life is but a gilded frame for naught and despair.

The root of a man's life is in his infancy. I will therefore begin by speaking to you of mine—not for the vain satisfaction of speaking of myself but in an universal human interest. For there will always be children, and every day the question of education will come to the front.

Education may either lead man to the true and simple life or prevent him from attaining it. In telling you of the origin, and, so to speak, of the incubation of my ideas, I must remember that there are some conditions favourable to such an incubation and others that are very unfavourable. All the conditions of my infancy

were particularly propitious to the birth of an independent will and a personal form of thought.

Without doubt, each man has a natural gift, an innate capital which is difficult to explain, which constitutes his primitive substance. This substance has a marvellous power of resistance. In speaking of certain individualities, the poet Alfred de Musset says:

"*La moule en est d'airain si l'ispére en est rare.*
Elle, La nature, sait ce que vaut son marbre de Carrare
Et que les eaux du ciel ne l'entament jamais."

"Their species is rare, their shape is bronze." She knows the worth of her Carrara marble, and how it resists for ever the attacks of time."

There exists, too, in each one of us the hereditary family marks. In Goethe's exquisite book, "Truth and Poetry," he speaks of the inheritance of one's fathers and says: "From my father I have the stature, the earnest driving

of life; from little mother, a joyous nature and the pleasure of imagining fables."

"Vom Vater hab ich die Statur
Des Lebens ernstes Führen
Vom Mütterchen die Frohnatur
Und Lust zum Fabuliren."

We all know the sayings "He is a born poet" and "Genius comes from heaven." In a numerous series of such formulas the wisdom of nations affirms the truth that an important part of what man may become in life lies within him in germ from the day of his birth. A good deal of this future is determined at that very moment in his flesh and blood and in the elements of his intellectual and moral nature, as it is with the bird in the egg.

Nevertheless, it is true that the circumstances that surround our childhood and the education we receive exercise an immense influence on our fundamental natures. Be it gold, marble, granite, or simple clay, how much depends on

the way it is handled! A bad workman can spoil a block of the finest marble; a genius can immortalize a block of common stone or breathe a soul into a lump of clay. This bad workman, this genius symbolizes education in its different works. Yet, it must never be forgotten, human nature with its inborn vitality is very different from the matter that is modelled or cut by the sculptor, because it is not an inert mass, but a living and sensitive.

The soul of a child needs rather to be watched with intelligence than cut into shape like a block of marble or modelled like clay. The secret of education is difficult to find because it varies with the subjects to educate. That is why so many men suffer from their earliest infancy. Some suffer from carelessness — others from an excess of training, from a too constant supervision. They are watched over, sheltered exceedingly, and finally extinguished. In this way we destroy the rising originality and at best we produce but conventional characters — here lies the danger of these ultra-careful educations

where everything is foreseen and mapped out beforehand. Those who suffer the most from such education are the warm-hearted and the impetuous children.

I was happy in having parents who watched over my infancy in such an intelligent manner that I hardly felt their supervision. Their influence was discreet and did not cast too deep a shadow on my young intelligence. They did not apply to me the system of precocious instruction at a period when ambitious parents stuff the just awakening spirit of children with abstract knowledge. They held it better to keep my mind alive by answering my questions, and in putting before me many things able to attract my attention. As I was naturally curious and fond of observing all that came within my reach, a great deal of time was given to me for looking and listening round about, in garden and fields. No screen in the shape of a prematurely given book, came between me and the living book of the universe. I have not been like so many young people, the victim of education,

shut up in a room or forced in a hotbed. I am open-air bred. I received what becomes so rare now-a-days, in this utilitarian and hurried epoch, a quiet and calm education, which is quite impossible in our monstrous cities. And I grew up in the peaceful surroundings of a village among good-natured labourers and woodsmen, enjoying healthy and happy liberty. At the same time the moral and religious authority that my parents exercised over me was never heavy handed. It was sufficient to direct my will without compressing it. It did neither break, nor pervert, by any brutal or intrusive action the mainspring of my mental activity. Every manifestation of initiative was encouraged with joy. Of course that education was more latent than manifest, and some pedantic school-masters would have been able to denounce it. My father had to fight for my liberty. When people exclaimed, "What! this boy is already six years old and cannot write!" my father used to reply: "What would he write if he could write?" One of those infallible boy-dril-

lers, croaking one day about my future, said magisterially: "Nothing will ever come out of him."

To give you an example of that education, I will tell you of a fact touching more directly my religious education. About that education, every one knows it well, many parents and educators of youth think they can never interfere either too much or too early. My father was a country pastor. I followed the church services and very piously said my prayers morning and night. But I was not overwhelmed by religious observances. My soul being naturally religious all things seemed to me holy. I walked through nature like ancients through sacred woods. Especially at nightfall the stars impressed me exceedingly. They spoke to me and I to them. I still remember the little gallery on the front of the parson's house where I used to kneel and worship the moon. Certainly my father noticed my devotions but he never prevented them, or disturbed me, showing me their idolatrous character. What reason could

he have for keeping silence in such a grave opportunity? Not another reason than his well deliberate respect for my inner life. Although it could be called an abominable heathenism, he respected the childlike manifestations of my religious feeling because he saw they were spontaneous and full of life. No doubt he said to himself: "The boy is too young to understand that God is *Spirit:* let him at present worship the moon and take it for a living being. It will develop in him the consciousness of what is divine; and when he will get older he will worship that invisible Light of which all visible light is only the faint image."

My childhood has left such a deep impression in my memory, that not only do I go back in thought to it with pleasure, but I also find in it an inexhaustible treasure of healthy and fresh impressions like a spring of everlasting youth.

When I need to live the deep life, I turn to the soul of my childhood, and I look at men and

things, birds, flowers, the heavens, and earth with the eyes of the child I was. I would not give up these pure memories, the sereneness, the feeling of blessed safety, the sentiment of universal intimacy in which one has a brotherly feeling for the ants that run under the grass and for the sunbeams that play on the meadow; — I would not give them up for all the riches of the world. For they are the chief capital, the true foundation on which is built the fortune of a lifetime. Without them we should be miserable, and wasted by a hopeless decay.

So I go on my way repeating to my contemporaries: if you have children let them live their own life; do not deprive them of the dews of the morning by a too early contact with the dry wisdom of outgrown people. Let them be young, be really children. Even if they make mistakes allow them time for reflection, for personal observation, so that they may find the nourishing substance that God has put for them into all things that are true, authentic, simple. And, if you can, put them soon, often,

and for as long time as possible, in contact with nature, with mountains, woods, fields, and with that glorious firmament on high which is the marvel of marvels. The rivulets that babble under the reeds, and the leaves that whisper on the branches in the mysterious recesses of the forest, have much to say to the children of men. They are the bearers of a message about things that are good, and sweet to hear; about things, no voice of a teacher, or of an artist, or of a book will ever reveal to them — things that awaken in their innermost heart that divine and inexpressible being we call the soul.

I was very young when I lost my father, and later on I missed him bitterly. When still a youth, I was left to my own self for many very weighty matters. But of this first education, I have kept the great law of my evolution, the love of the simple and of the true, the hatred of everything which is artificial and fictitious in all the spheres of human working. And so, wherever I have walked, life spoke

to me a personal word. I had not to take an interpreter to translate for me the voice of nature, nor did I want to take any cicerone who would show and comment to me the pictures of the creation. I did not wish to secure for me either an intermediate agent between God and my conscience, or any kind of broker between myself and myself. In all directions I pointed straight to the well-spring. I believe that God has given to every man as much as to every tree his own roots wherewith he may suck up the sap necessary to raise his fruits. I am no disbeliever; I am rather and at the bottom a believer. But my faith spread its wings above the formulas and dogmas. I am not mistrustful. But never shall I be satisfied with whatever maybe told by one of our fellow-men about God, about the Universe, about the soul, or what is human or divine. I hold that here is no truth to be obtained by proxy. Nobody is able to drink for me; I want to drink for myself. Every one of us needs self-thinking and ought to go to the source. The fictitious life,

the conventional truth, which we mean to buy is very expensive. It costs our liberty, dignity, and many other precious things although it has no value. The true and simple life which gives peace to the soul; the life-giving truth, all that costs but little; it wants only to work, yet either the money or the influence of the whole world could not buy it. Therefore said the Prophet: "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; yea come, without money, and without price."

You may object that such a method, quite individual and independent, would be a hinderance to our understanding the experiences of other men, and also a hinderance to hold in veneration as it is due and as we need it, the old and sacred traditions. But it is shown clearly by many proofs that only self-thinking men are seriously able to discern others' thoughts. So doing, they work their daily work, whilst men satisfied with commonplaces and ready ideas have no ability to judge. They are only able to accept summarily, or briefly reject, others' ideas

without contesting them. As for the traditions of the past, they are only revered in as much as we may grasp their deep spiritual meaning and perpetuate it. To rekindle, to warm them again at the fire of our life; to make them useful and helpful for the present day, is it not the true and fruitful manner of hallowing them?

Nevertheless, there are some risks in such a method. A young man ought to be reserved. Only a due modesty enables him to receive all sorts of good warnings. When his own ideas are condemned by the people among whom he lives he may be stopped by a dilemma like this: Either he shall lose the proper reserve in order to remain himself, or he shall waste his own individuality before the world's opinion. On both sides lies risk. A great many young men do not escape the danger in the time their character is taking its decisive shape. Some grow overestimating themselves; others are neutralized. I have known such a jeopardy. There was hard striving and above all much suffering. It is a deep pain to see men having

authority, whom we respect and love sincerely, condemning what we admire and casting an anathema over what we care for. I have been labouring under the inward feeling of those pioneers of the future who are conscious of our debt for the past. Inclined to piety by nature, I held a special veneration for old people and old traditions. And still the ferment which raised my young soul like a generous leaven raises the dough, put me in opposition to current ideas on social, political, and religious life.

Happily for me I was obliged by very earnest circumstances to ponder over matters which could not be put aside. Some young men have no idea at all of questions. Some others perceive them from very far, as when we gaze on clouds running in the sky far away. Even the thunderclap comes to their ears quite weakened. Before others, questions appear suddenly as the revolver of a robber at the corner of a gloomy wood. There is no possibility of escape. Such was my case.

I grew up in a time which was not an idyllic

one, a time full of battles, contrasts, conflicts, individuals, interests, thoughts, at war against each other, emphasizing the differences, and above all floating in the air the cursed war-whoop, "I have nothing in common with thee!" Had I been bred among one-sided men, in a well-closed camp, having nothing to keep the equilibrium, perhaps I should have become a partisan, the man of a book, the lunatic of a formula. I would have found my glory in tearing myself from the adversaries and shouting also: "I have nothing in common with you." But now, led as by the hand of God, I may say, in a way where I met with men of all thoughts, I had with them quite loving relations, although between them there was often no more likeness than between fire and water. If one has never been entangled in such a precarious situation, he is not able to perceive how tragical it may be. When about twenty years old, on the point of religious matter I was tossed about between the most exclusive, the most traditional, orthodoxy,

and the free thought, the most bold if it was not the most negative and revolutionary. Churches were battle-fields and there was on Sundays in perhaps every pulpit, storm, hail, lightning, and thunderclap. My good grandmother coming back from this worship used to complain and say: "Is it not a pity to be a modest suffering people needing a word of comfort and to find only fightings of these legions?" I kept each word in my heart and promised, if some day I should become a preacher, to preach just what my good grandmother in her white moonshine cap would have wanted to hear preached. As to the politic, you must understand that I was an Alsatian, and the terrible war of 1870 was hardly over. Therefore I found myself in the focus of one of the most vehement national conflicts of modern history. My education had led me to understand the adversaries and to appreciate in each one the best they had. My grandfather was a German, my mother a French woman. Though I was a good Frenchman I liked Germany too,

and now I was half in despair to see my beloved little fatherland torn asunder. Instead of being what it ought to have been, a link between two nations, it became a bone of contention, and that for generations to come.

On the social point of view, I was living among very disinherited and humble people and I was with them in full sympathy like with my own flesh. But I had relations and friends among the higher class, and there also I found wisdom, justice, and devotion. But there was no day when some one did not try to conquer me for his own and exclusive sake. And so I was between the anvil and the hammer. If it is a good place for having the character hammered, it is not, you can be sure, a very comfortable one.

I will give you a living instance of my tribulations in telling you an event of my student life. I had a very good friend who had been from his childhood enrolled under the banner of strict orthodoxy. He was a hearty fellow, and in his way a good Christian, but

looking upon every one which had not his catechism, as a very pagan. One day he took me apart and then in an intimate and pressing talk urged me on choosing deliberately between God and Satan — God, namely his creed. The creed of the neighbours was Satan. I openly told him the truth about my state of mind. I showed him I was quite unable to make such an exclusive choice, for I was seeing everything good at the right as well as at the left, and it would be a want of uprightness on my part to become the man of either party. Now my friend, moved to the extreme, stood up and stated strongly that I was under the sentence contained in Revelations III, 15 and 16, against those who are "*lukewarm, neither hot nor cold*," and he added that we were nevermore to meet again. You may fancy what was the state of my mind when I was alone in my room. I remembered another word of the Revelations where it said: "*and I wept much.*"

Sometimes the tragical and the comical fol-

low each other as in the immortal plays of the great Shakspere. I want to narrate you a small incident which shall gladden the gloomy relation of theological wartime. The student who had excommunicated me was my intimate friend. Until this day we used to drink together after luncheon a cup of coffee, in our rooms at the old theological seminary of Strasbourg. In order to get a delicious and cheap cup of coffee we had bought together a tin coffee-pot. The day after the tragical scene I went up to the room of my friend where was the common coffee-pot. I thought it was not impossible to drink coffee together as before. But my friend was not of this opinion. He explained to me he was bound in conscience, though it was painful to him, not to have any intercourse with me from this day on. And the poor coffee-pot was left on the small shelf, lonely and silent, sad witness of a broken friendship.

How do you find that? You think that is mad, exaggerated, insane? But you see such a comprehension of life at every corner. We see

every day men who avoid each other and cut off any account of sociability because they have not the same creed or the same politics. And however men are divided by ideas or by interest, would it not be better they meet from time to time, were it only for drinking a cup of coffee or playing cricket? That could be a way of understanding each other and it would be an open door to a future union. Tell me not that union between men is a foolish dream. It is the very aim we all shall drive toward. Never ought we to be consoled seeing the kingly cloak of humanity torn to pieces through our own hands. Tell me not the struggle for life in the world of thought, as in the world of business, is a fatal, an iron law. For the iron is in our hearts. And that is the reason why so many struggles are unjust ones, and so few people fight the good fight.

The more I was disturbed by that narrow-mindedness the more was growing in me a larger sight of things. Though I was sometimes worn out and driven to say, "Blessed those who can

say without reserve, *Yes* or *No;*" such discouraged hours were bye-and-bye scarce. Even on the fields of battle my heart became more and more a silent place of refuge of higher justice. I begged the God, who is making His sun to rise on the evil and the good, to show me the right way. I felt that it was not only my right but my peculiar duty to bring together in my own soul as in a luminous and hospitable city the scattered sparks of good, without anathematizing any one. Could I not love alike the old Gospel, all the very treasure of the past, and the thought of my times when it was just, noble, and consequently godsent? Who would forbid me to love the France of St. Louis as well as the France of Coligny and also the France of Pasteur? Who would forbid me to love the land of Corneille and Victor Hugo and the land of Luther and Goethe? Could I not be a brother, too, of all social ranks and appreciate every one in its just aim in its working for commonwealth? Well, yes, I could, much more I ought to do it. *For in the moral world: Power*

is duty. Every day these thoughts were growing stronger and my sadness was going on. An inward voice, an unseen friend, was whispering at my ear, "*Don't fear, I am thy helper*," and out of my inward life I found the commentary of that word which struck me so much when later on I read your Emerson's, "Trust Thyself."

The time had now come for me to speak; to express openly and in public the thoughts that had for a long time been working in the innermost recesses of my heart. For those who mean to speak in public, the first rule is to be silent — to be silent for a long time and to listen to the lessons of spirit and of experience. But there is a time for everything; a time to be silent and to listen, and a time to speak. When once the time to speak has come, this is the chief rule to simplicity of speech: "Fear nothing and conceal nothing; speak as naturally as you breathe and live. Unfold your thought like a standard!"

As I would not adopt any official denomina-

tion or shibboleth, I found myself at the beginning absolutely isolated. No pulpit was open to me. Besides I was unknown, without a name and lacking authority. I was therefore truly a voice in the desert, but soon the desert woke to life. The man who expresses with energy things that have been lived through, that come from the deep well-springs of reality, will always find an echo in the hearts of his hearers. Those who listen to him will recognize their holiest and most secret thoughts, strongly and clearly expressed; their consciences will answer: like answers a silent harp when a true voice strike its chords.

I remember with joy those first gatherings in a small room where thoughts tried their strength as birds try their wings. There were no large audiences, but an assembly of earnest men of all classes of society, souls seeking eagerly, as I myself had sought so long, for a new and living form in which to express the old truth of faith and life. This summons to simplicity of faith or of act, to simplicity in the

expression of human and divine truth, went straight to their hearts. It seemed to them, when we explained the words of the Gospel, that the Voice of the Mount rang in their ears, and that the promise, "My sheep hear My voice," was fulfilled. Their only regret was that these words of comfort and of encouragement, these precious truths, should be heard by so few.

The best way to spread them abroad was by books. I had arrived at the age of thirty-eight without having ever written a book. For me the true, the grand, the one book, was life, and all that I had learned, as a living active creature, in that book, I preferred saying to writing it. All my inclinations were for the fiery and ringing word. But I understood that speech was limited and could be fettered, whereas a book knows no distance or obstacle. A book goes everywhere. If it wins a favourable reception, it becomes a companion, a friend; if one goes on a journey it is not left behind; before going to sleep at night one reads it; if ill, it keeps

one company. Moreover, a book can be translated in all languages.

And so I, who love to speak rather than to write; who preferred walking to being seated, and who would even have preferred riding to walking, I remained seated and I wrote. Yet my books were like stories of travels and battles, vivid images of action and of life.

At first I wrote "Justice" eight sermons, striking all in the same direction like eight hammer-strokes over the same nail. The book is a direct call to a fair mind and to the most elementary and simple rules of equity. In the preface I say: "If violence is the salvation of brutes, the salvation of men is justice!"

After "Justice" I wrote "Youth" in 1892. It was the first of my works that was translated and published in America. In France it became my standard-bearer. It was the first book in which my thought, criticised by a very favourable press, reached a widely spread public. The book was crowned by the "Académie Française," and grew popular very rapidly.

Before having written it I was nameless, known only to a few friends. By "Youth" I became well known, and at that time I was called "the author of 'Youth'."

I have always loved youth, and hope always to keep this love alive in my heart. Young people, too, have always been fond of me. In their company I have passed many happy hours. Having at first won their affection and confidence, I was enabled to be useful to them in many ways. Young people love those who love them, but let us always remember this: If we love Youth, we must respect its independence and not attempt to exercise undue pressure on it. To love young people is to be ready to understand them, to enter in their way of thinking. After you have acted in that way towards them, you may be sure that your example, your ideas, will have all the more influence if you have not attempted to lead them too much. At the period when I wrote "Youth" I was constantly surrounded by a club of young people sprung from the most varied social positions. In order to

learn to know them thoroughly I wished to come in contact with youth in all its most dissimilar shapes. The only condition of entrance into our club was to be an honourable fellow. Catholics, Jews, workmen, clerks in business, students, all these different elements were mingled, and I became the friend of each and every member. We discussed all subjects, but had a predilection for such subjects as touched especially young men's lives and hearts.

Each one was not only at liberty to express even the boldest opinions but we considered it a duty to do so. Our rule of discussion was as follows: To proclaim clearly one's own ideas, and to respect the feelings of others. For myself, as long as the discussion lasted, I interfered as little as possible, and only to keep it on its own lines. But once the battle over I said:

"Now, gentlemen, that each of you has said what he thinks on the subject, allow me, in my turn, to express my thoughts on the matter."

Before my book "Youth" came out I read it aloud at these meetings and, so to say, tried the effect of it on the juvenile spirits that were for me an epitome of the youth of the present time. The book may be resumed as follows: In the first part, a kind of balance-sheet of civilization and an appreciation of modern life with its actual surroundings — the second part, the exposition of a new ideal of life.

At the sitting of the Academy where the book was crowned, I was accompanied by a young and intelligent printer. When we left, he said to me: "'Youth' is specially a book for students and cultivated persons. Now, Mr. Wagner, you ought to write another book, more concise, more within reach of all, that would be as a vigorous trumpet-call for young people, to encourage them to energy and lead them on to all noble aspirations." I immediately reflected on the way in which I could satisfy my young companion. In the course of that year I wrote "Vaillance," a kind of *vade-mecum* for youth.

This book was also published in America, but its publication having coincided with the Cuban War, public attention was absorbed elsewhere. I think it well to call your attention to its existence. It is a book that has been widely read by my young countrymen in all classes of society. It has been for them a support, and a help to keep in the straight path.

After "Courage" I wrote "The Simple Life," which is the best known of my books in the United States. So I think it may interest you to hear an anecdote of its origin, which was accidental. Although all my childhood, breeding, experience and thinking, had led me to practise a simple life, never had I the idea to write about it. Naturally, all my behaviour was simple. Such as a stone in falling, a bird flying, I loved simplicity and felt a repulsion for all artifice in language, thought, amusement, art, literature. But I was far from having the least inclination to theorize about it. And it was well so; it was in conformity with an ever standing rule: "The best we have is

unconscious." But it needs only a small shock to be awakened.

One day, calling upon Mrs. Edgar Quinet, the widow of our great thinker, Edgar Quinet, the late professor at the *College de France*, and Senator, that very graceful and spirited old woman said to me:

"Mr. Wagner, would you be kind enough to bestow the wedding blessings upon my maid? She is engaged to a workman and is to be married next week."

I immediately agreed.

The audience was small; the young betrothed, their witnesses — Mrs. Edgar Quinet and Miss Buisson, the daughter of the well known French political leader, Ferdinand Buisson. I spoke in the way I used to do in such opportunities, with a cordial sympathy for the young couple and a perfect simplicity.

A few weeks afterward Miss Buisson came to be married also. In the very intimate talk I had with her about that important event she said to me:

"May I ask a great favour of you, may I?"

"Certainly you may."

"Well, be so kind as to make a speech on my marriage-day, exactly in the same way as you did when you performed the ceremony of the marriage of Mrs. Quinet's maid."

"Oh! that is not very easy. At the maid's marriage there were only six present, at your wedding there will be more than a thousand people: members of parliament, ministers, professors, members of the Academy, all kinds of learned people. The way of speaking ought not to be the same when we have such a select audience."

Mr. Buisson, who had been listening to these last words, smiled and said:

"Mr. Wagner, don't be anxious about that, and let it be done according to the wish of my daughter. You will please her exceedingly."

I promised to do it. In my wedding speech before the most clever people of Paris, I spoke in an unpretending way about simple life, and urged upon my young friends my deep con-

viction that the very happiness of life lay in a true and normal mode of living.

Among my hearers was Mr. Armand Collins, one of the foremost publishers of Paris. As soon as he reached home he sent me a letter asking me to write for his firm a book about the subject of my address. We met some days later and had a talk. After that talk, though it was very short, I felt so full of thought concerning the projected book that, immediately walking across the street, I began to take notes, and I had not reached my home when all the heads of chapters were fixed. I had the book in myself without knowing it. And so "The Simple Life" saw the light of publicity like a well-formed healthy little child born in the most favourable conditions.

"The Simple Life" was a great success in France. All the papers spoke of it with sympathy. In particular there was an article by Mr. Francois Coppée, which was a pleasant surprise for me. It is this book that has made me so widely known in America and won me the

friendship of many citizens of this country, and particularly that of President Roosevelt. I had long honoured in my heart your President, whose name is pronounced with respect in all countries and is in France so deeply honoured and admired. Shall I tell you in what circumstances I learned that he had read "The Simple Life"? It was in September, 1902, I was just taking a good rest as it is a rule of simple life and lying on the sands on the beach of the West French Island Oléron. Surrounded by a number of old fishermen I was telling them stories. One of my children brought me a letter from America. It was a friendly note from Dr. Lyman Abbott, the editor of *The Outlook*, to which I had contributed some articles. The editor wrote to me in French to inform me that President Roosevelt had spoken of "The Simple Life" in a public speech he had made at Bangor, and that he sent me word to be sure to come and see him if ever I travelled in the United States. This letter caused me extreme pleasure. I spoke of it at once to the old companions

near me, adding: "I fear that I shall never be able to go to the United States, for I do not know a word of English."

One of the old fishermen, lying on the sand, said: "English can be learned? In your place, Mr. Wagner, I would learn it at once."

"You are right," said I, starting off home to tell the good news to my family and to begin learning English.

After "The Simple Life" I was known in the United States as the author of "The Better Way" (French: "L'Ami"), a book of meditations and interior dialogues. I wrote it in grief and anguish, and suffering hearts understood it. . . .

"By the Fireside" was then brought out here. This book was written to pay a debt of gratitude to family life which gave me so much and which I hold the corner-stone of human life.

I can not speak to you in detail of all my books, as I have written a full dozen, but I must announce that shortly will be published in English a sketch book on which Miss Mary

Louise Hendee is at work. This book has been written by the poet that lives in my heart, for I am a poet and shall die a poet. I could say as the poet Gerock says in his beautiful song of the twilight:

"*And all my soul became a song.*"

My sketch-book is entitled "The Soul of Things." It is a collection of nature pictures and scenes of life whence by direct observation superior truths are born. This book has been written slowly, day by day; begun before the others, I continue it still, and it will only be closed with my life. Alas! what are men's words to express life! The deepest impressions are inexpressible. The most beautiful songs have never been sung and the finest pictures have never been painted!

Since my books have been spread in the world they have met with such a sympathy that in my boldest wishes I had never been able to conceive. They have been translated in Eng-

lish, German, Russian, Italian, Spanish, Swedish, Norwegian, Dutch, Danish. They caused me to be brought into a large contact with my own countrymen of Paris and France, and I was introduced through them to a great many men of all tongues and of all nations. That was the result of the current of ideas deeply human and kindly disposed which were met with in my books. The thoughts which are to be found in them are strongly and frankly expounded, but there is neither irony nor bitter polemic. Living, as I do, out of the deepest roots of humanity, it has been a great satisfaction for me to be understood by men of very different breeding and creed. From everywhere I received letters from people telling me they were my brethren. How many other people, who do not believe as I do, have been writing to me in such a way:

"We love your books because they are a help to living; they induce us to act and to love; they are like a sunbeam which warmeth the soul."

Is it not the highest reward for the writer,

to meet people he has never seen before, grasping his hand, like old good fellows and brethren? How often have I had this joy! As I wish to be chiefly a man, I have been able to sympathize with every one whatever might be his own business, and I became bye-and-bye the free chosen confident and confessor of a great many souls. I have been reading in the inward book of the heart of so many people of all kinds, and I have loved them all, and I communicate with them in those depths of our human nature where the true Gospel leads us, wherein there is no more Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor freeman. My books brought in my Sunday meetings many new hearers. Some of those to whom it had been said that I was a dangerous, even deluded man, sought direct information, came over to listen to me, and became my faithful followers. My meeting hall on Boulevard Beaumarchais, though far from the centre of Paris, was every Sunday I used to preach, quite filled up. And the more I was talking about the burning problems of the day, very calmly and frank-

ly, the more the audiences were crowding. An old Lutheran clergyman, pastor — President Kuhn — having read my book "The Better Way," wrote to me: "You ought to preach on the distress of the soul." Immediately I began a series of sermons on this subject. At each sermon the number of my hearers was increasing, in such a way that the hall became too small and I was obliged to give up my scheme.

But we cannot leave without answer all these eager souls who want to listen to the eternal old truth in a new language, and we shall be obliged as it is written in the Book, "To raise up the lintels and to open larger doors." God shall be our help, as He has been to this day. The One who has sent me to preach, and does incline so many hearts to this message, shall direct a great many friends who will do their best to help His servant in bestowing on him the necessary means to prosecute His scheme.

Having come to this part of my talk, let me express some objection which may remain in

your mind about simple life. Perhaps some of my hearers may say: Do you seriously think that the simple life can be lived in a time like this, amidst the business, the noise, and the exigencies of modern civilization? Is not simplicity, although lovely and graceful, a far away shining light of the past, which will never more come back to us?

To those who put this question I reply with a complete conviction:

Simplicity is not any exterior good belonging to a special time. Simplicity is a state of mind, like uprightness and probity, a state of mind which, in a certain degree, belongs to the most indispensable condition of life. The less we have it the more we need it. The exterior complications of our present life come from our want of simplicity in heart, otherwise we would soon be able to change our life. No time needs more to be taught simplicity than a time like ours. It needs simplicity like a dry land needs water.

A friend of mine, the French poet Jean

Aicard, describing the African desert, Sahara, says:

" Tout le grand desert, reve d'une chose ;
Un goutte d'eau pour faire une fleur."

"All the great desert dreams but one: a drop of water to make a flower."

Often when I look over cities like Paris, New York, and other monstrous places of the same kind, when I look at the life of the people in the cities, who run, push each other, have no time to be the husbands of their wives, the fathers of their children, it seems as though I look over a big sunburned desert in which the living heart of men, the feeling soul of everyone dreams about a drop of heavenly water, of fresh, healthy, and normal life for making a flower of happiness and peace. If the tired pilgrim, worn out towards the evening for having made so many miles, is ripe for reaching the fatherhouse, we, men of to-day, are ripe for simplicity.

But there is another and perhaps better reason for speaking about such a matter in America, and here may be my personal message to this people. The more I know you the more I understand that at the bottom of your national life is a great and powerful simplicity. Some weeks ago I was in Philadelphia in your Independence Hall. I felt as if I were in an inspiring sanctuary. I looked at the pictures of the men who made America: Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Jefferson, the Pilgrim Fathers, and — one who is more nearer us — your immortal Abraham Lincoln. And all that I saw, around the impressive cradle of your republic, was heroic simplicity. Some days afterward, coming to Washington, I stopped before the White House and was struck to find it so very different to the political houses of kings and kaisers. No exterior glory, no view of soldiers and army, but a high and grateful and bright simplicity. And within where I was allowed to grip and hail the man who is, by the will of the people, the head of the greatest republic in the world, I found him

so plain, and, although he is a most strong, intelligent, and decided character, so tender-hearted, and all over so straightout and spontaneous, that I understood better than ever —at the bottom of American history, at the bottom of your most venerable traditions and your best men, is a great, magnificent simplicity.

To keep this golden rule will be your salvation. We have not to be the slaves of our ancestors but to stay true to the first inspiration which is the secret of our national health. And so, as a Pilgrim and a guest and as one who loves you and your children the more he knows you, let me deliver you my message: Teach the boys and the girls of this beautiful country to look at the men who made America. Before a face like that of Lincoln, no pride, no vainglorious and superficial vanity can stay. Such faces are open books wherein is written this very life. So never forget it, otherwise you would forget your first love, and America would no more be America.

And now this hour is already over, where

we have been talking about the greatest of all concerns. But if this hour has been short, I hope it may have a long and useful consequence. May we all take a resolution. It matters little which land we are dwelling in, which language we are speaking, the social or religious creed we believe in, all of us ought to be converted to simple life.

"*We are all the same at the bottom*" was written to me by President Roosevelt in one of his letters. We lose the fruit of life when we complicate our life in such a way that there is no more a spot for the only necessary thing. And so our deeds, our institutions, and our whole civilization are judged by the word of Christ. "The Sabbath has been made for man and not man for the Sabbath." Religious and social institutions, science and industry, the endeavour of men's struggles, all that is to be combined to help us live the very life, to be better and happier, stronger and more brotherly. But we must take care. All that, instead of being an instrument for justice and peace, may become an en-

tanglement and a bondage, and man may perish under the burden of his own creations in the same way as is perishing in our big cities the poor child deprived of pure air.

What is the greatest danger of to-day?

When man is depraved, weakened, disparaged by his own work, by his evil managed power, his badly used conquests, his instincts become vices, his knowledge turns into mere denial and scepticism, his faith into fanaticism, his comfort into decay, his patriotism into hatred of the foreigner, and his love of himself into selfishness. In a word, every function is deprived of its aim, every cistern void of the promised water. This is the great, the threatening jeopardy of to-day,

Every one has met people who are fond of asserting that man is descended from the monkey. Some are very happy to hear that and prompt to believe it; some others hold such an assertion sacrilegious. That apish ancestor makes them wild with horror. Looking at myself, I am not much troubled over such an ancestry,

neither do I glory in it. I have written somewhere that I should like even to be an ant provided I may become an ant of God. And if God, in leading men from dust to the spirit has chosen so many intermediate and humble ways, why are we to take offence at it? I don't care about the way, provided it is an ascending one. Well. But let me tell you what we ought to be afraid of. We have to be afraid, not of the monkey of the beginning, which after all remains a puzzle; we have to be *afraid of the monkey of the end.* Yes, when I see individuals and societies going astray out of the right path, I have sometimes the terrific vision of mankind coming down to the brute. I look at man ending in a sort of monkey, hideous outcome of our moral deformity, our decay, our accumulated degeneracy. To descend from a monkey and grow a man, after all, that is an improvement and a gigantic one!

But to be men; having given birth to Moses, Plato, Jesus Christ, having subdued the powers of nature, having made the thunder the horses

of his carriages, and the lightning his messenger; having done all that, and then to forget it all, running towards the beast in the baseness of the appetites, the ferociousness of the feelings, the eclipse of conscience — what a downfall in darkness! What a tragical end in the mud of the abyss!

Yet that shall never be. That divine sower who sprinkled stars in the endless skies and sowed men in the gloomy fields of the earth has fixed for us another fate. It may be that men go astray; but it is not forever. The soul is thirsting for the true and higher life and it comes back always to the fresh well-spring.

The coming back to the very well-spring of a simple and true life: that is what we are preaching. We beg the souls full of good-will, to gather together for that end all over the world. We urge them to realize simplicity, brotherhood, to bring from everywhere whatever good they have in them, and to ally themselves to fight against all the evil, which consume us.

I am happy with a deep and complete joy in observing how numerous are in this country the friends who understand such teaching.

I am thanking the Almighty that He has led me amidst you. And I may say that I feel not at all a stranger here. I feel as if I was one of you coming back from a long journey abroad.

Help me by your sympathy. May your heart throbbing in time with my own confer on me a renewed power and a stronger impulse! So I shall rise up every morning for the good fight to strengthen the power of the simple life in myself and in others, that I may be able to deliver the helpful message to all those who are my brethren in pain and also in hope.

The simple life is the true life. It shall remain when the vainglory of day shall be but mere dust. And its aim shall last for evermore, even when the stars of heaven, tired of their long watches in the nights, shall close their eyes like children who want to sleep.

APPENDIX

New York, December 15, 1904.

To the American Friends of Pastor Wagner and his work in Paris:

Pastor Wagner left America on the first of December. His presence in this country brought a great blessing. He has now returned to his work of translating the old truth in the words of to-day to his great Paris audience.

Friends near to him saw clearly his intense anxiety concerning the work to which his life is devoted. This solicitude is the outcome of the great limitation upon his constantly increasing power for good. He cannot, for want of a sufficiently commodious hall in which to speak, receive the crowds that come to hear his instruction.

His Parisian friends are ready to give him a hall worthy of his work. Although they are people of intelligence and learning, their finan-

cial resources are very modest. The great obstacle to the fulfilment of Pastor Wagner's hopes appears in the great cost of the land needed for the hall. The situation causes him very great solicitude.

Many American friends of Pastor Wagner are seriously impressed by the position of his affairs, and are anxious that his service to this country should be recognized by substantial aid to the need of his Paris work. An eligible site facing a public square can be bought for a sum of $80,000 to $100,000. Cannot this sum be raised for him in this country? Thus, if America will give the land, France will give the building.

We know the man. His books are his best witnesses. His public personal service is the centre from which his ideas and books were evolved. It is a focus of life and light that has universal interest. The appeal is for the strengthening of this focus. If American friends do their best and present the ground for the new hall to the good Pastor, he will be relieved from his present burden of anxiety, and will

be free for the larger work that is now only awaiting the greater facilities that will appear in the hoped-for building to be known as "The House of the Soul."

The undersigned are a voluntary committee for the object as herein stated. Every sum, great or small, will be welcomed as a precious sign of interest. The Treasurer will gladly receive and acknowledge all remittances.

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Pastor Wagner preaches in Paris at 91 Boulevard Beaumarchais every other Sunday at quarter past ten. All his friends in America who come to Paris and care to hear him, have only to write him a letter, and they will receive a card of admission.

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